

Thirty-five Years of living with Anthropology: A Reflective Memoir

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Abstract

The paper is reminiscence of my engagement with anthropology over a period of thirty-five years as a student, teacher, researcher, and development practitioner. Since this is a personal reminiscence and I thought that it can be best narrated in a biographical framework, therefore, the narration starts from my sojourn in economics until the year 2013. It also contains a discussion of why and how I moved from economics to anthropology and also how over the years anthropology has progressed in many fronts and never stopped changing its focus and subject-matter. One pertinent question that often worries me as anthropologist is whether anthropology is the study of "everything" or to put it differently whether "social anthropology is what the social anthropologists do"? If that be the case, then I wonder where is there any boundary of anthropology? Is this a strength or weakness? A close look at these and other related issues is the need of the time while we venture into the question how anthropology is going to be practiced in this century.

While narrating my experience I take the position that changes made through what I often called "search for relevance" has indeed made anthropology useful, relevant and dynamic, contributing to both theory and practice. I try to situate myself in this debate by providing some arguments in favor of this position and in the process draw from my previous incursions on these

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issues. I call it a reflective memoir because much of this discussion from which I draw comes from my own experience as student, teacher and researcher spanning over a period of more than three decades.

From Where to Start?

When I was thinking to write this reminiscence of my life trajectory which ran over more than four decades teaching in economics and anthropology, I was wondering how and from where I should begin this reflective assessment¹. Prior to my settling in anthropology, I was enrolled as an economics student in the mid 1970s at Dhaka University and later taught economics at Chittagong university. Therefore, it will be remiss to ignore this segment of my life trajectory because my sojourn in economics, study of economics and later teaching economics has significant implications in shaping my teaching and professional career later. The switching to anthropology from economics was a significant departure and was unusual to friends and colleagues of mine. So I owe an explanation for this 'strange and unusual' move². I will start this segment with a brief recollection regarding how I have started pursuing economics and later switched to anthropology. I call the following narration a reflective memoir in a biographical framework because much of this description from which I draw comes from my own experience as a student, teacher and researcher.

My Sojourn in Economics

Since my school years, I had a dream to study economics at Dhaka University. During our time economics has always attracted the bright students which are true even today. So the competition for getting a seat in the department was indeed very tough and we had to appear in admission test to secure a position to study economics and ultimately I made it. What is unique however, that the number of students with very bright academic results that we

had in our class was simply unprecedented. My friend Amin recalls that "when one of our Dhaka University professors asked 'who stood first' among you in the Higher Secondary Certificate examination (HSC), he had to then sort out the first position holders by board and arts/science and by Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and HSC. Then at least half of the class stood up when he asked the students with 'place/positions' to stand up. Then he asked students with 'first division in both SSC and HSC' to rise. Nearly the whole class was on their foot at that point³". I always considered myself lucky to be among the finest cohort of students of our generation which created scope for me to interact and learn with the best students of that time.

I finished my undergraduate and graduate study in economics at Dhaka University in the early 1970s. Our MA examination was postponed and result delayed because we were engaged in non cooperation movement and later liberation war at the call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Dhaka University was almost under siege and many students of Dhaka University joined the *mukti bahini*. The examination and the result were not important for us during this juncture of the Bangladeshi nation. The country and the future of the nation were more important for us than our exam and degree. I left Dhaka around the middle of March for Comilla my home town. Our result was published after the independence in the middle of June 1971.

After the publication of the result I was unemployed for some time and kept applying for different jobs. My first job was with the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)⁴ where I worked for about a year. While I was at IRDP, I had to undertake numerous trips to the rural areas and got acquainted with the rural economy and the society, life and livelihood of the people. I could feel that I am learning a lot from these trips which was an eye-opener for an urban educated young economics graduate. While I was working at IRDP, I got an offer for Lecturer position in the department of economics of Chittagong University⁵. Prior to the

independence of Bangladesh it was indeed the dreams of many economics graduate to compete in the civil service examination and enter in various cadre services.

This scenario changed significantly after independence. My friends who graduated from economics started looking for jobs elsewhere and civil service was not the top priority for many of them. Some of our friends joined university as Lecturer, others at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Economics⁶ (BIDE) and some others in the planning commission, international organizations and few in the civil service. Zaid Bakth writes that, "at least 10 amongst us who joined international agencies had very successful career. Nearly 40 amongst us did their Ph.D. and a sizable number pursued teaching profession with great success. We have bankers who performed extremely well, at least 4 civil servants who retired as secretaries of the government of Bangladesh. We had ambassador, university vice-chancellor and even a chief of army staff from amongst us. Those who are in the private sector have also done extremely well⁷. There is wide proliferation of interest in the pursuit of professional career by my fellow classmates.

My Days at Chittagong University

Immediately after independence university job was a very sought after job, so when I got an offer from Chittagong University, I did not spoil a single day. I offered my resignation from IRDP and joined Chittagong University (CU) on August 1, 1974. The joining of CU was one of the milestones in my career for two reasons.

First, I got the first opportunity to teach economics at different classes. Just to begin with Professor Yunus asked me to teach two courses which are micro economics at the MA preliminary class and comparative economic systems at the MA final year class. I really felt elevated that being a newly appointed lecturer, I was asked by the Head of the department to teach two important courses at the MA class. Second I came in touch with Professor

Muhammad Yunus. Professor Yunus was at that time running a programme called "Rural Economics Programme (REP)" through the funding of the Ford Foundation. One of the major activities of the REP was the evaluation of *Swanirvar* programme in different parts of Bangladesh. The *Swanirvar* programme was designed to make the villages self-reliant through self sufficiency in food. I was asked by Professor Yunus to conduct evaluation of three villages where *Swanirvar* programmes were implemented. One of these villages was located in Noakhali and two other at Chittagong⁸. I would not claim that these were very high quality reports, however, what was important for me and for my career that after IRDP this has provided another golden opportunity to know the rural Bangladesh more closely outside the classroom. Due to the constant interaction and supervision of Professor Yunus, as Project Director of REP, I learnt a lot regarding how to conduct fieldwork, write report and present in logical sequence. Sometimes I found Dr. Yunus very critical and rude but I was never disheartened and later realized that these were extremely useful in molding my research background in the future years.

While at Chittagong University I got a grant to conduct a study on Union Parishad leadership from the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh⁹. At that time I was a young lecturer without any exposure to research tools and limited experience of rural Bangladesh. I was aware of the survey methods which indeed I used in my works during this time. I moved around many villages and talked with the people and conducted the survey. But I was not sure how to utilize the wealth of information that I gathered through unstructured interviews, informal chats and also observation.

I was young and energy was at a high level. I wandered around the far flung areas of Chittagong and had a close glance of the economy, society, culture of the rural areas of the Chittagong. I also had firsthand experience of fieldwork though mostly by administering questionnaire. By moving around the villages of Chittagong, I have learnt two things:

First there is significant difference of what I taught at the class room and what existed in the field. Second, I realized the limitations of gathering information by administering questionnaire only. I felt that useful information is lost when interviews are conducted through "a set of pre designed questions". Therefore, I was wondering how I could go beyond numbers and capture the reality from the perspectives of the interviewees. I was not sure how to do this and I did not have the knowledge and training to undertake such a venture.

While at the Chittagong University, I was looking for opportunity for higher study. Indeed during 1974 between 1977, I got admission and funding from few universities of North America to study economics¹⁰. In 1977, I applied for an Agricultural Development Council (A/D/C) fellowship¹¹. The selection process was lengthy and arduous and finally I survived and got the fellowship¹². When I applied for the A/D/C fellowship, I proposed to expand my earlier studies and do some work in interdisciplinary nature. I wanted to expand my previous study on Rural Leadership and I sought advice from Professor Muhammad Yunus. He suggested that it is too early to decide on a topic for research for Ph.D but encouraged me that if I feel I can pursue anthropology and work on a topic which is "interdisciplinary" in nature. Frankly speaking, I did not have any idea about anthropology and also how it is linked with economics. But I decided to take a chance to pursue anthropology thinking that it will provide me a different type of training and opportunity and bring new ideas to the study of economics. I also thought that I can work and contribute in various research and other activities that the department is going to pursue under the leadership of Professor Yunus. I got the confirmation of the fellowship and placement at Purdue in May 1978¹³.

When I finally decided to pursue anthropology my friends and colleagues both in economics and other social sciences were asking me what anthropology is and why I am switching to a subject

about which people both inside and outside the academic arena has no knowledge at all. Some of them were even surprised how I could take such a decision to leave economics which is the most sought after discipline anywhere in the world to pursue higher study in an unknown and unfamiliar discipline. Some of them even advised me to give a second thought. I was confused. Frankly speaking, I was also not familiar with the basics of anthropology. I could not explain anything to my economics colleagues and friends about anthropology. I looked for books at Chittagong University library, I could not even get an introductory text in the university library. Some sociology colleagues of mine were trying to educate me that anthropology is the study of "human evolution" and while others linked this with "archaeology". But nobody could give me any idea about anthropology beyond this¹⁴. I looked at these books procured for me by A/D/C but could not make much sense out of this. I was also not sure whether my move from economics to anthropology was the right decision. I was nervous thinking what lies ahead for me in a completely new discipline.

Study of Anthropology in the USA

I left for Purdue, USA with my wife in late August 1978 to start my programme in the fall which started from the middle of September. I landed at the department probably on September 8, 1978 to meet the Graduate Chair who would remain my graduate supervisor until my selection of "Major Professor" who would be my Ph.D. supervisor later in the programme. The graduate chair provided me some papers including a booklet on the department which spelled out the requirements of anthropology graduate programme and how I should plan and proceed in the coming months at Purdue.

I found the programme at Purdue very structured geared to the requirement of what I later learned as "mainstream anthropology". There was no flexibility as far as the core courses

are concerned which are similar to other anthropology programme in the USA. I was told by my interim supervisor that during the period of course work I will be required to take four courses which are designated as "core courses". These are two courses in theory, one course in physical anthropology, one in world pre-history (also known as archeology) and another was in anthropological linguistics. I was also told that I would require appearing at a "diagnostic examination" after I complete 36 hours of course work¹⁵. Before registering the courses, I carefully looked at the course description in the university catalogue and also took the course outlines from the teachers who offered core and other courses in the previous semesters.

After reviewing the course outline, I have realized that physical anthropology, world prehistory and linguistic courses do not match my interest areas and I thought if I take some other courses instead of these courses would suit my interest and will be relevant in future. Moreover being trained in economics at the undergraduate and graduate classes, I do not fulfill the prerequisites to take graduate courses in physical anthropology, world prehistory and linguistic. I found that these courses are very technical in nature requiring pre requisite and minimum level of understanding of the subject which I do not possess. For example, physical anthropology require good grasp of not only elementary biology but also higher level biology¹⁶. Before I registered for these courses, I had several meetings with the graduate chair of anthropology and school chair whether I can get wavier of taking these courses and instead take courses which would more suit my major interest areas of economic and development anthropology. But the anthropology chair was firm and repeated the same argument that these are core courses and all prospective anthropology graduates are required to take these courses as compulsory requirement. However, he stated that from his experience he found the students coming from other disciplines do not face any serious problem to fulfill the requirement of core

courses. In spite of this I was terrified thinking that my future is bleak and I was not sure whether I will survive.

In the first two semesters, I completed the requirement of core courses. It was a tough but good experience for a person coming with background in economics. Anthropology programme at Purdue was quite rigorous and I had to work hard to cope with the demand of the various courses specially the core courses. I have to read books on pure biology, anatomy and primate behavior in physical anthropology course and archaeological methods in world prehistory course. I have to read and understand literature relating to dating and other methods. These were essential for these courses and I had real difficulty to begin study on all these subjects which were totally new to me. I was also wondering what would be its use in my research when I want to concentrate on cultural anthropology¹⁷.

During this time pressure of study was so heavy that sometime I felt that I should give up and return home. I was not sure whether I could survive the 'onslaught of pressure' of course works but I survived with what I would call with 'dignity'. During the course work, I found the courses on seminar on ethnographic analysis, socio cultural change, cultural ecology, economic anthropology; visual anthropology, society and technological change and peasant agriculture were useful. Two particular courses that were quite revealing to me were cross-cultural methods and cultural ecology. The methodology courses exposed me for the first time to anthropological research methods. This created a new outlook and mindset for conducting, analyzing and presenting qualitative data¹⁸. I completed my 48 credit hours of course work in the summer of 1980¹⁹. In between after completing 36 credit hours, I sat for diagnostic examination for Master of Science degree and was conferred MS on May 1980. Later in early spring 1981, I sat for the PhD comprehensive examination and started working on my proposal. I defended my proposal and I proceeded for my fieldwork in the beginning of spring of 1981²⁰.

My coursework and stay at Purdue was critical for several reasons: *First* it marks the formal switch to anthropology from economics. *Second* I had intensive coursework in theory, methods, and good exposure to contemporary issues in anthropology and also in my field area. *Third*, there was a kind of dissatisfaction in my mind and I was wondering how can I apply what I have learnt so far in my fieldwork and research. The coursework appeared quite rigid and there was minimum flexibility in the pre-designed programme at Purdue. I found that few core courses were not directly relevant to my interest area. This has put me in trouble but I had to succumb to the system and the prerequisite of the department.

I started my fieldwork with an open mind to learn from the field and not being much influenced by what I have written in my proposal²¹. This is indeed what I argued in the subsequent years that all anthropologists should conduct their fieldwork with an open mind but should have a structure and a conceptual framework otherwise the research and fieldwork becomes aimless. During the fieldwork, I kept constant contact with my professor at Purdue who was very supportive of my views and the way I was conducting the fieldwork²².

Fieldwork in Bangladesh

Prior to getting started for the fieldwork I was wondering whether conducting fieldwork in one's own society is easy. There is no straight answer to this question which is a debatable issue.²³ Although I felt that the anthropologists should conduct their research in their own and also in other societies, but I emphasise that research in a particular country should not be made exclusive only to its citizens shutting it off totally from the outside anthropologists, similarly, researcher from the Majority World countries²⁴ should be allowed to undertake research in the West. We may initiate a dialogue with the social scientists of the West regarding how we can make this happen.

In this regard, I argue that the researchers and anthropologists from the non Western countries should also get access to conduct research in the Western countries. It should not be a one sided activity only the Western would come to the non-western countries to conduct fieldwork. I take a position that there is need to dispel the existing myth that the so called "pre industrial, pre literate, primitive and tribal" constitute the "ideal location" of anthropological fieldwork. For the Western anthropologists some regions of the world have become very "popular" and "ideal" location for anthropological research.²⁵ In recent years, there has been a change in this direction but this is very slow. It is yet to get momentum due to lack of funding for the anthropologists of majority world countries so that there is movement from both directions.

In one of my recent papers, I have designated the trend of returning home by the anthropologists irrespective of both Western and Non Western countries as "nativising anthropology"²⁶. By "nativising" anthropology, I indicate a tendency of anthropologists belonging to both Western and Non-Western societies to stay home to undertake research in their own societies. Indeed a positive development in this regard has been occurring and nativising has become an important trend of anthropological fieldwork since late 1970s²⁷.

I arrived in Bangladesh in the early Spring (March) of 1981 with the hope that I will be able to achieve my target and conduct the fieldwork without facing many problems. I was always under the impression that conducting fieldwork will be easy because I know the language, culture and was familiar with the rural areas of Bangladesh because of my large scale involvement in fieldwork through the Rural Economics Programme of Professor Yunus and also my IRDP experience. I also thought that I will be able to establish rapport with the villagers and get the necessary information that I will require for my purpose. I found that the field level reality is different compared to what I anticipated prior

to starting the fieldwork. Indeed after my dissertation fieldwork and also conducting numerous fieldworks in the rural areas of Bangladesh for various purposes, I have learnt that naïve expectation that people will accept an "outsider" like me cheerfully will help and provide information without asking counter question is no longer true. Indeed people are very curious and want to know the identity of the researcher and also his/her purpose.

There are many issues which are linked with the types of roles and nature of relations of anthropologists with the inhabitants of the community. I recall Peter Kloos (1969) drew our attention to what he calls the "role conflicts in social fieldwork"²⁸. According to him, while conducting fieldwork a researcher has to consider three reference groups. These are: the group s/he is studying, the society from which s/he comes and the scientific group. Kloos (1969) suggested that there are many differences between these groups with regard to values, truth, violence, hunger, life and death, honesty, illness, prudence, etc. Indeed he further adds that in many instances scientific values may clash with personal values, personal values with the values of the group studied and so on²⁹.

This led to incongruity and conflict of views and values of the researcher and the community within which he works. I have suggested that this incongruity and hidden prospect of conflict is embedded in the class difference of the people which is outcome of social-economic inequality in every society³⁰. In a class differentiated society, normally the position of the anthropologists whether s/he is native or expatriate is generally different from the researched population.

I have argued that due these differences the anthropologists are always regarded as "marginal man" whether they work in their own or in an alien society. Indeed, I call the anthropologists and other social scientists who conduct research in their own society as

"marginal native" or even I will not hesitate to call them as "urban native³¹". This is indeed what I have realized during my engagement with anthropology in the last thirty-five years.

Glimpses from the field experience

I have many interesting experiences during my fieldwork in different parts of Bangladesh on different subjects in the last thirty-five years. I narrate just one experience that opened up my eyes and provided food for thought regarding how I should approach fieldwork and define my relation with the community where I intend to undertake fieldwork. The following is the experience that I gathered while conducting a study on male perspectives on reproductive health. I quote below from the report:

The first problem faced was the general reluctance of the respondents to sit and discuss the issues of the research with us. The respondents always gave an impression that they are busy and even when they did sit they become disinterested knowing the nature of the questions. On many occasions the respondents did not turn up on their suggested day and time. They gave me an impression that we are the outsiders and intruding their privacy.

On one occasion, I found a respondent very hostile and angry after the interview. He said to me, "why are you spoiling our time? In the past, we have seen many people like you who come and go. We are all busy. You will get good money for your work. Your research assistants will get salary. What do we get for our time from you? You give us nothing, not even a cup of tea. We are not interested in you".

I was not surprised with this kind of attitude. In Bangladesh and also in other areas of the world people are tired of seeing and responding to questions by academic researcher, consultant and students. Another problem that I faced is how I should introduce myself and the objective of the research to the community prior to conducting the fieldwork. This issue relates to the identity as well as the transparency and accountability of the researcher.

Indeed asking about the identity of an "outsider" like me is what I would call a "normal query" and people have the right to ask this. I faced these questions when I started my dissertation fieldwork and later in my professional pursuit either as academic researcher or also as consultant in many projects. Since the beginning of the dissertation research and later in many other field pursuits, I have introduced myself in the following way. This kind of a self introduction is very normal³².

- "I am a student. I need to collect data because this will help me to write a dissertation and get a degree". (Reaction: So What? This is your business and not ours).
- "I am collecting these information to write a book (meaning dissertation) and if I write a book many people will know about you which might help you in the long run" (Reaction: It does not make any difference to us).
- "You know I am asking these questions to discern your idea and opinion about Later I will write a report on your area and let the concerned authority know your problems and they may undertake programmes to solve the various problems of your area. This will benefit the people". (Reaction: So you are government people and we do not trust you.).
- "I am a university professor and I am conducting this study for an NGO. NGO will undertake a programme on the basis of my findings of the study. This will benefit the people of your area." (Reaction: Not interested. NGOs are not helpful for all).

It appears to me that people are not very enthusiastic in spending time and providing information to the researcher. People normally feel that this is wastage of their time and also in some cases intrusion of privacy without any immediate benefit to them. I faced situation when the respondents avoided me and even abruptly discontinued the interview³³.

My arrival in the two villages created a lot of excitement and expectation; however everybody was wondering who I am and why I am conducting this work. They also wondered why I am staying in the village for such a long period³⁴. My longer stay raised many questions and even suspicion such as, what I will be doing with the information that I am collecting. Some information is sensitive (i.e. land, income, expenditure, production etc.) and people also wondered in what ways this is going to benefit the villagers. Anthropologists try to minimize these queries by letting people know their purpose and also by establishing rapport and building mutual confidence among themselves. This is what I did at the initial stage of the fieldwork. I took some time to make contact with the villagers, talking with village *murrabis* (elderly) and also walking through the village and talking with the villagers and introducing myself as university professor. During this time I also introduced my research assistants. I also told the villagers my research assistant will stay in the village for several months and I will be coming to the village frequently and talk with them. They assured me their full cooperation during my fieldwork in the village.

I faced several problems at the initial stage of the fieldwork. The first problem related to my decision regarding how and whom to involve as informants. Second is the dilemma how as a researcher I should interact with the villagers. From my experience I suggest that these two issues need serious attention when there are several socio-political and religious factions in a community and the hostility and tensions among these groups are common. The researcher should be careful and choosy so that he does not antagonise one faction against the other. No researcher should undermine this issue.

In Garibnagar village, I found two distinct and hostile socio-political groups. One group is led by the Union Parishad (UP) Chairman and other group is led by a Parliament member and his followers. During the first few days of our stay, chairman's nephew followed us everywhere in the village. In Garibnagar, we

identified at least two dozens of land related conflicts. I also found a great deal of discontent and anger against the UP chairman. In Chetanpur village, there were two distinct religious groups and within these two groups, there were sub-groups. The relationship between the two groups was cordial but as a Muslim, I had to be very careful, so that my role and views do not create any impression that I hold any political ideology and sympathetic to any religious group. I always argued that a researcher undertaking fieldwork should pay attention and respect the sentiments of the population where he is working.

During my stay in the village, people made various speculations about my identity and motive. I discovered three speculations regarding my identity and purpose. First speculation was that in disguise of university professor, I am actually a government official. Second speculation was that I might be a worker of a political party and has been working to open a base in the village. Third, some people thought that the local Member of Parliament had sent me from Dhaka to undertake a survey so that the village can be declared a *swanirvar* (self-reliant) village.

Back to Purdue Again

I completed my fieldwork and returned at Purdue in mid December of 1981. I stayed in Bangladesh for little over nine months for fieldwork. After return my major task was to organize the heaps of information that I collected which are scattered and also disorganized. Another challenge was to put together the information in such a way so that it conforms to what I have written in my dissertation proposal and also reflect the theoretical framework that I stated prior to going to my fieldwork. During this time I got full cooperation from my major professor and also from the members of my dissertation committee. Finally, I completed my dissertation and submitted on March 1983 and I defended the thesis successfully later. I was asked to make some minor correction and submitted the thesis³⁵. I was conferred the

degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology for my thesis *Marginalization, Pauperization and Agrarian Changes in Two Villages of Bangladesh* in May 1983. I consider this moment as another milestone in my career. This was indeed one of my happiest moments of my life³⁶. I provide below a very brief description of the main thrust and theoretical underpinning of my dissertation³⁷.

I have argued that in contrast to a widespread notion that a concentration of resources and income is taking place among few people, I have shown that an increase in population, cost of production, decline in productivity, income and real wage tend to impoverish all classes of people irrespective of their social, economic and political positions. The degree of impact of these situations differs among various socio-economic groups but it rather affects all. The situation is one that I leveled "marginalization" rather than large scale "polarization", overall "pauperization" in contrast to improvement, complexity instead of simplicity in agrarian relations. However, I pointed out that these kind of scenario also led to inequality within various classes of people in the rural areas.

My analysis was based upon three concepts: marginalization, pauperization and "agricultural involution", the later concept used by Clifford Geertz in his Indonesian case study³⁸. In my thesis, I have used marginalization to refer to individual response to impoverishment and pauperization is a decline in the general economic condition referring to the impoverishment of all classes of people. Selling and mortgaging of land, selling of household goods, a decline in real wage, an increase in cost and a decline in productivity and income are seen as specific indicators of this process. I have pointed out that increasing marginalization and pauperization leads to the proliferation and complexity of agrarian relations which I have called "agricultural involution". Finally, I have pointed out that the agrarian change that I discerned is reflected most through changes as well as diversification in occupations, in income structure, in land ownership, in other socio

political formations and also emergence of inequality in the rural areas.

After thirty years I would say that what I said and written almost three decades back still appear to be a dominant trend of the rural economy of Bangladesh. Although significant changes have been occurring in the life and livelihood, poverty has declined due to interventions by NGOs through microcredit and other programmes but this did not bring what I argue permanent succor to arrest and contain general pauperization. Although poverty has declined in percentage terms but question can be raised to what extent this has equalizing effect in the life of the people. People are remaining poor, and what is noticeable however, some of them have become "better off poor". The decline in poverty does not mean that inequality has been narrowed down.

Back to Bangladesh

I returned to Bangladesh on July of 1983 and joined the department of economics at CU with PhD in anthropology. When I came back I found that Professor Yunus who has encouraged me to undertake higher study in anthropology has left CU for Dhaka to replicate his Grameen Bank model to other areas of the country. I felt very bad and I was wondering how I can utilize my newly acquired knowledge in the department of economics. I met Professor Yunus at his Grameen Bank Shamoli office³⁹ and he gave all his blessings and asked me to continue my teaching at Chittagong University. I became Associate Professor of economics on June 7 1984 which was due for some time. I was not feeling uncomfortable at Chittagong and I was in the midst of some excellent colleagues from whom I have learnt a lot. However, I was looking for opportunity to pursue my teaching and research in anthropology.

When I rejoined economics department of Chittagong University, I was wondering what will be my "identity" when I was working in the midst of economists but has received highest degree in anthropology. At this time I read an article prepared by T. Scarlett Epstein where she described how she wanted to be treated being trained both in economics and anthropology a situation similar to mine. So I have decided to follow what Epstein suggested regarding her identity and position. Following Epstein (1975) I would say that my first academic training in economics qualifies me as an "*anthropological economist*" (i.e., an economist conversant with anthropological approach) and the second one in anthropology as "*economic anthropologist*" (i.e., an anthropologist familiar with economic concepts)⁴⁰ (emphasise mine). This I feel uniquely portrays my position and I pursued anthropology for three decades with this value and identity in mind.

Joining Anthropology Department at Jahangirnagar

The opportunity came in 1986 when the first department of anthropology was opened at Jahangirnagar University and a post of Associate Professor in anthropology was advertised in the national dailies. Due to oversight I missed the advertisement and indeed after two days my wife drew my attention that Jahangirnagar has opened department in anthropology and they are looking for an associate professor. I saw the news paper and was indeed surprised. I was not expecting that opportunity will come so soon. I talked with my friend in economics Professor Khondokar Mustahidur Rahman at Jahangirnagar University who was also the dean of Social Science and acting as the Chair of anthropology. He was very delighted but surprised to hear that I switched from economics to anthropology and obtained MS and PhD in anthropology from Purdue University. He advised me to apply for the post.

I joined the Department of Anthropology at Jahangirnagar University as Associate Professor on April 19, 1987. This was

indeed a *major turning point* in my career for two reasons. First I made formal switch to anthropology from economics and second I thought I will be able to work in a new discipline which does not have any precursor and will get an opportunity to build a new department though a daunting and challenging task. I took the challenge. At the time of my joining there were two full time teachers and one adjunct faculty from Dhaka University⁴¹. I became a professor through an open selection process on May 8 1991⁴². The department was small so is the number of students. In the first year class there were only 21 students and I was assigned to teach "Introduction to Anthropology" which I enjoyed very much⁴³.

Anthropology: My Views and Ideas

Immediately after joining the department I wrote a paper highlighting the prevailing misconception about anthropology, uses of anthropology and also giving my views about the future of anthropology in Bangladesh. This was kind of a vision paper about my thinking and expectation from anthropology which was at its infancy in Bangladesh⁴⁴. The discussion that follows in the next two paragraphs has been taken from my 1988 paper.

When I started teaching at Jahangirnagar, I found that very few possess a clear idea about anthropology, its objective, subject-matter and methods. Indeed I encountered many awkward queries from the colleagues of other disciplines, university administrators, parents of students, employers and even from the general public. For example, I found that anthropology is almost universally understood as study of "primitive people" or study of "human evolution". Another commonly held notion by a section of sociologists is that anthropological research involves participation observation technique and anyone pursuing this technique in their social science research can claim that they are conducting anthropological research⁴⁵. I have challenged this kind of narrow minded leveling of anthropology⁴⁶. I have argued that conducting

long term fieldwork through participant observation does not make someone "anthropologist". Anthropological training is much more rigorous and requires exposure to theory, methods ethnographies and also fieldwork. Anthropologists use many techniques along with participant observation which complement one another⁴⁷.

Regarding the uses of anthropology in Bangladesh, I have always believed that anthropology would train and nurture to create generation of social scientists having a mindset that would help them to understand the problems around us not only critically but also through cultural lenses in value free manner. I have emphasized the use of culture concept as a major analytical tool in the study and research of anthropology⁴⁸. Furthermore, I emphasized that considering the objective conditions, need of the society and priority of social science our focus should be on "Social Anthropology."⁴⁹

In the 1988 paper, I clearly spelled out my position about the future of anthropology in Bangladesh and also how I would like to see anthropology to evolve in Bangladesh in general and at Jahangirnagar University in particular. I wrote that "the future of anthropology in Bangladesh depends in what manner we design our anthropology programme and train our students." For Jahangirnagar, I pointed out that *we need to develop a tradition of Bangladesh Anthropology which will be "need-oriented, relevant and native anthropology"*⁵⁰ (emphasise mine) that will not only complement the pursuit of other allied social sciences but also fulfill the expectation of the society. Through this I actually made an attempt to draw our attention to the "social responsibility of anthropologists" i.e. our duty and obligation to the society at large. I also emphasized the need to take a value free, liberal and pragmatic attitude while training the future generation of anthropologists. I also put my views against accepting theory and taking a position without understanding the "inherent meaning" and "intellectual context of the development" of anthropology.

By context of development of anthropology, I am asking that anthropology students or any interested person in anthropology should have a thorough understanding of the history of anthropology, its colonial legacy and how the discipline has evolved focusing on the study of so called "primitive" people by the West. These issues are indeed relate to the intellectual formation of the discipline⁵¹, its colonial legacy⁵², the post-modernist critique and challenges⁵³ and also regarding the way that anthropology has been practiced in the past as well as in the present. Anthropologist's role in development and also in several wars and liberation struggles has been seen with criticism and suspicion. Therefore, it is important that the students of anthropology must have a clear knowledge about the intellectual history of the discipline, its pros and cons and then situate them within the discipline and create own niche and position. What I am trying to say here is that the students must make informed choice regarding the discipline and how do they want to pursue this in future. From this I have emphasized on "the contextualization and operationalisation of the various concepts, theories considering the insider's viewpoint and the reality of Bangladesh."⁵⁴

So I started my journey at "my home" in the department of anthropology at Jahangirnagar with the ideas, views and proposals which I spelled out in my 1988 paper. Now after 25 years when I look back to what I said I am not disheartened and dismayed with the way anthropology has progressed in the last 25+ years. Indeed "anthropology has not stopped changing always looked for relevance, adopted and responded to the changes around so that it caters the need of the academia and the society at large. When I put forward my proposals for "need oriented relevant anthropology", I was accused by few of my colleagues that I am trying to promote what these few called "market anthropology", however, ultimately good sense has prevailed and anthropology at Jahangirnagar has progressed always searching for relevance and

revisiting the curriculum to meet the contemporary need making it a center of excellence⁵⁵.

In the next few pages I will discuss and try to historicise how the department of anthropology at Jahangirnagar has reached as we see it today. I will also state my position regarding the four field approach, applied anthropology, changing focus and boundary of anthropology. I will also describe what does anthropology really means to day. Finally, I will end my journey by making few proposals for the future of anthropology in this country on the basis of my reflection of past.

My Task at Jahangirnagar

The first challenge to the faculties prior to the opening of the department was to prepare a state of the art syllabus after reviewing syllabus of anthropology elsewhere in the world and also need of social science of the country. In this pursuit the main challenge was to show how anthropology is different from other social sciences especially sociology⁵⁶. When I joined the department in 1987, I found a syllabus which was prepared for the 1986-87 academic session. The faculties responsible for the preparation of the syllabus did a commendable job⁵⁷. I found the curriculum comprehensive which covered areas and the issues necessary for a good anthropology programme. In this syllabus the emphasis was given in the study of theory, methods and reading ethnographies along with certain specialized course such as, political power and authority, agrarian structure, pre-industrial society, Soviet anthropology, anthropology and colonialism and radical anthropology. However, in the subsequent years the syllabus was revised, few courses were merged; renamed, extended and new courses were introduced.

In bringing these changes what were considered most is overlapping of courses, link between courses and also the going concern and need of contemporary anthropology. The courses that were added include medical anthropology, environmental

anthropology, urban anthropology as well as society and cultural change. Few more new courses added were: South Asian society and history, founders of modern thought, political movement and collective identity. At the MSS level some courses on contemporary issues were included. These were Microcredit, Indigenous Knowledge, Migration and Diaspora, Child rights and Visual anthropology. Indeed Jahangirnagar was always innovative in introducing new courses which was applauded both within and outside the academia. In the process of updating and changes no course on theory and methodology was dropped rather the theory courses were expanded in terms of scope and subject matter. Applied Research course is a new addition which was found very useful. *I always thought and argued that building of academic curriculum is a process and therefore, it requires regular revisit and revision to make this useful and contemporary.*

Good curriculum: Some suggested prerequisites

Even prior to the joining in the anthropology department, I was wondering how anthropology curriculum in Bangladesh should look like in contents, approach and also in fulfilling the need of the discipline and the country. In course of last three decades, I have gone through many syllabuses both in Europe and in North America. I was also involved in the formulation of syllabus of different universities of the country⁵⁸. From this I came to the conclusion that the following are the important prerequisites for good, comprehensive and forward looking curriculum in anthropology:

- a) *Anthropological Theory*: Theory course will not only include the theories that evolved over the last 150 years but should also emphasise the formation of the discipline and its link with colonialism. The history of anthropology should be a component in the study of theory. The focus here will be on how, in what ways and context theory building has occurred in the past and also until the present.

- b) *Research Methods*: Anthropological research methods should be discussed in conjunction with research methods of other social sciences. Though the emphasis of anthropological research will be on qualitative research tools but the quantitative methods should not be ignored. Courses on statistics and computer use must be included in the methodology courses. Students should also get exposure to various computer software that are in use in anthropology.
- c) *Mainstream anthropology courses*: Anthropology curriculum should include courses on kinship, peasant society, political and economic anthropology, agrarian structure, religion and belief system and ethnography. Students should get exposure to some classic ethnography and link this to the theoretical paradigm when the fieldwork for ethnography has been conducted.
- d) *Courses on Contemporary topics*: The focus in this segment should be on development, globalization, civil society, environment, climate change, fundamentalism and terrorism. The purpose of this type of course will be to discuss the issues from anthropological perspectives and to discern how the students relate this to anthropology.
- e) *Courses on applied anthropology*: It is difficult to disaggregate the courses which are purely applied in nature. One important course in this segment is a course on applied research methods which can go under the purview of research methods. Focus in this regard should be on health, environment, development, microcredit and gender issues. Medical Anthropology is very much valued all across social science and public health arena. But I want to emphasize that though I am incorporating these issues under applied anthropology, there is significant theoretical underpinning of all these issues.

I will argue that the recent syllabus of anthropology at Jahangirnagar adequately fulfills the requirement of what is

expected from a world class anthropology department. The syllabus which is currently followed both at honours and master levels provides the students "a through grounding in anthropological theory, methodology, paradigms and epistemology, fundamentals of various specialized fields of the discipline, along with exposure to other human sciences".⁵⁹

My Position in Four-field Anthropology⁶⁰

In this section I will take a position and situate myself within the four-field approach in anthropology and contemporary thinking in this context. Indeed in Bangladesh none of the anthropology department pursues the four fields as core areas in the study of anthropology. Since my joining the department at Jahangirnagar, I have focused my teaching and research in social and cultural anthropology and related issues that affect the culture and society in multiple ways. Though I have studied physical anthropology, world prehistory (i.e. archaeology) as prerequisite for coursework at Purdue, USA I have not found this useful not only in my dissertation work but also in my pursuit of teaching and research later⁶¹.

I would briefly provide some glimpses on the current debate and the declining interest on four-fields and how I situate myself in this discussion. Since its inception the discipline of anthropology is divided into four sub-fields. These are: cultural anthropology (sometime called social or socio-cultural anthropology), archaeology (also called prehistory), physical anthropology (also known as biological anthropology), and linguistic anthropology. In recent years applied anthropology has been included as fifth-fields within general anthropology⁶². The four-field, which is also known as "four in one notion" in anthropology, has dominated the teaching and research in anthropology in North America since its inception more than a century back. It is widely believed that in order to have broad and holistic understanding of human behaviour and cultural change,

knowledge about the four fields and the awareness of the linkages between them is essential. For example, Bertocci argues that training in anthropology should encompass the four sub-field approaches. All anthropologists ought to have broad awareness of human biological and cultural evolution over millions of years. Regarding the relevance of four fields in Bangladesh, Bertocci points out that in the Bangladesh context the study of *human evolution is problematic* but there should not be problem with promoting awareness of cultural past and *the contributions of archaeology*⁶³. (emphasise mine)

There is a large group of anthropologists who contend that four field is "no longer relevant and should be abandoned". It is pointed out that sheer amount of knowledge in the various fields has increased overtime, and apparently greater differences in theory, methods and subject matter have emerged, making interchange across fields less frequent or useful⁶⁴. Geertz (1991) also questioned the necessity of maintaining four-field approaches in anthropology. He writes "it has become a little unreal because even when all four exists in one department, they *do not interact and cross-fertilize each other in the true spirit of the four field approach*"⁶⁵ (*italic mine*). Wiest on the other hand takes a position against four-field approach stating that he was never a strong believer in four-fields. He further states "that these are based largely in a particular cultural arena- aboriginal North America at the turn of the century, for example, in which the practitioners of anthropology did have some need for exploration of artifacts, analysis of language, and curiosity with the origins of humankind as they sought to demarcate the boundaries of traditions, populations, and politics".⁶⁶

Although I was trained in North American tradition of anthropology, I am not ardent advocate of four-field notion of anthropology. I feel that in Bangladesh there is very limited scope to pursue this in a *meaningful way* due to several reasons:

- First in a situation of limited budget in the public universities maintaining of the four subfields in the university departments will be very expensive. The development of infrastructure to create opportunities for teaching and research of these sub-fields will require substantial investment.
- Second there is a serious shortage of trained teachers in these fields. Most of the departments face problem in finding suitable person to offer courses on archaeology, physical and linguistic anthropology. The departments in this country could not encourage the teachers and also to provide opportunity for training in these fields. In Jahangirnagar University, we could not motivate our colleagues to pursue higher study excepting cultural anthropology. I also don't think that it is proper for single person to offer a course in physical anthropology or in archaeology year after year without any break.
- In addition to this one basic question is to what extent this is necessary for Bangladesh. I agree with Wiest when he said that, "the four-field is more a *perspective than it is a practice (italic mine)*. In some persons it is more pre-occupation with tradition than adjustment to new paradigms and arenas of discourse⁶⁷"

Applied and Pure Anthropology: How do I see it?

The debate between what is called academic and applied anthropology and the relation between the two is going on for quite some time in anthropological discourse. In this section, I will describe my position and reflect where I stand in this debate though I have already stated how I view anthropology in the context of contemporary scenario⁶⁸. To me applied anthropology is the application of knowledge of anthropology learned in the academia to understand and critically analyse various socio-economic problems taking into cognizance the social responsibility and the possible contribution to knowledge and society⁶⁹. There has been significant proliferation of interests in applied anthropology which I

view that anthropologists are getting involved to apply their knowledge in real life situation which is a positive development in the field of anthropology. However one related question that requires attention is how far we should go in this regard.

I take a position by saying that it is a good trend in the right direction and will make anthropology what I am arguing "need-oriented and relevant." However, I would add that one should be careful how it is practiced and for what purpose. I am raising this question because I am very much aware that a good number of anthropologists are prejudiced against applied anthropology and what is also called "practicising" anthropology. I will briefly discuss the debate and views on applied anthropology to put my position in the proper context. Gough (1968a) who is one of the most vocal critiques of anthropology vis a vis applied anthropology suggested that "applied anthropology" came into being as a kind of social work and community development effort for non-whites peoples, whose future was seen in terms of gradual education, and of amelioration of conditions many of which had actually been imposed by their Western conquerors in the first place⁷⁰." Grillo (1985) on the contrary put forward that there were four types of activities within the purview of applied anthropology. These are ⁷¹: "Research on contemporary society, especially on 'culture contact,' later to be called social change, in the colonies; research on a number of specific problems of concern to colonial administrations (not always or even usually at their request); provisions of information and /or advice to those administrations; and the involvement of anthropologists in the training of administrators".

Epstein (1987) observes that social anthropology presently finds itself at a turning point at its evolution. Either it will decline in general significance, or it will evolve in tune with the overall socio-economic and political changes occurring around us by *broadening its focus and university teaching (emphasize mine)*. Therefore, Epstein (1987) feels that social anthropology may either decline in significance if we insist on pursuing anthropology within academia which she calls *pakka* (pure) anthropology

without broadening its focus and university teaching⁷². Applied anthropology is also viewed as an "occupation for the half-baked"⁷³. Indeed a "continuing divergence between mainstream academic anthropology and applied anthropology has created a feeling among many university-based staff that only the "second rate anthropologists" carried out applied work, while the real anthropologists worked on loftier, self-determined subject-matter⁷⁴. This is in spite of the fact that many important anthropological works are now being conducted outside the academia and these works are still structured within "pure" and "applied" conceptual division. Shore and Wright (1996) believe that the *powerhouse of the discipline* is still thought to reside exclusively within the *university departments* whereas work generated outside of the academy is considered *largely irrelevant* to the mainstream"⁷⁵. (emphasize mine)

I do not believe that there is any conflict between theory and application. I agree with Shore and Wright that that from the theoretical and methodological points of view, applied anthropology is one of the *most innovative and exciting growth areas within the discipline* ⁷⁶ (emphasize mine). Furthermore, I suggest that there is no scope for confusion because I am convinced that a good applied anthropologist must have solid foundation in academic anthropology. Application always leads to generating new knowledge and ideas that may strengthen existing theories create new one and ultimately enrich the current store of knowledge. Indeed applied research always gives empirical support to theory. I consider that the superficial leveling of theory and application, academic and applied anthropology is unnecessary and does not advance the value and scope of the discipline. Let us be open, critical and find out all aspects of the debate in advancing and leading anthropology in the current century.

Over the years during my work, I have found that application contributes to generating new knowledge and ideas that may

strengthen existing theories create new one and ultimately enrich the current store of knowledge. Furthermore, research always gives empirical support to theory. Kuhn quoted in Partridge and Eddy (1984) has rightly pointed out that, "In science, the basic dialogue between theory and application is at the heart of any progress. Applications are in part determined by the adequacy of theory, and theory is accepted or rejected over the long run in relation to its utility in successive applications."

I take a position to suggest that there cannot be one brand of anthropology that can be treated as superior or best. One of the important features of anthropology is *"unity in diversity."* Anthropology is going to flourish in the changing world by diversifying and incorporating new views, theories and areas within its domain and also by allowing everyone to pursue anthropology with free and open mind. Anthropology should be allowed to progress freely without any imposition or control from any school or thought. This does not mean that anthropologists cannot take their own "position" and "views" and pursue their stand freely. I trust in the freedom in the exercise of one's knowledge and ideology without being too persuasive and one must respect, listen and tolerate other views and position.

Another point of view regarding theory and application is whether theory always necessary for applied research in social sciences. I think that theoretical framework for applied research is useful but it cannot be a precondition or essential for applied research. A good applied research may aim to generate information by applying anthropological research techniques and provide in-depth analysis of the information thus collected. New information and analysis generated by applied research may lead to better understanding of old theories and also provide input for building new theories.

Therefore, I view that an applied social scientist or an anthropologist need not always be a theoretician. Theory may be an outcome of the process of research and application. Although I believe that theory may aid and strengthen applied research, I do

not want to confine applied research within some theories or concepts. Applied research should be free, open and aim to generate information that will enrich our knowledge. Bhaba (1994) succinctly summarizes this point:

Application is linked to theory in two ways. First, applied research design is (or should be) informed by theory; a strong link to theory improves the quality of applied research. Application is linked to theory in a second way when applied research yields data that become part of the foundation for future theoretical development, including both modification of existing theory and new theory⁷⁷.

Now I would like to add few words regarding academic and applied dichotomy, which is sometime seen as theoretical and applied divide. I emphasize that we should not waste time debating what is academic or not-academic and where there is theory or not. Rather, we should concentrate to create a kind of anthropology, which not only creates new theory but also caters to the need of the society. I believe that there is opportunity for theoretical work within the framework of applied anthropology. Indeed "theory aids practice and applications fuel theory".⁷⁸

Similarly Bennett (1996) from his experience argued that theories based on empirical evidence would be more acceptable and credible. Bennett (1996) wrote that "I myself have generally synthesized applied and theoretical-academic data and theory in the belief that there should be no real distinction between the two".⁷⁹ I suggest that this issue should be properly understood and explored. Theories that are based on information derived from the field are more realistic and credible compared to the theories which are created within classroom or an anthropologist's office that are branded as "armchair anthropologists". For example, Bhaba (1994) stated this as follows:

The future of our discipline, however, will be shaped largely within the academy and within our academically grounded associations. It is the *principal responsibility of academic anthropology* and its associations to advance the core intellectual content of our

discipline and to train the practitioners who will utilize that intellectual core to solve problems and practical benefits to the society as a whole.⁸⁰
(emphasize mine)

I have already indicated that applied research in anthropology does not have a 'clean go' because of questionable roles of a few anthropologists during the British colonial rule in Africa and also later in various parts of the world (Asad, 1977; Gough, 1965a, 1965b; Lewis, 1973). Therefore, over the years I always took into cognizance the history of the formation of the discipline, the topic of my research or consultancy and also asking to myself why I am conducting this study and the ultimate use of information collected. I have always prioritized my responsibility and accountability as a researcher to the researched population.

What I indeed always asked to myself is how the researcher can play his role and conduct his research with honesty, transparency and sense of belongings to the population where the field work has been undertaken. I thought a lot on this issue and there is no easy answer how the research can be conducted in a universally acceptable way. During my numerous fieldworks, I conducted my activities in the following way.

First is to introduce myself and research topic to the relevant persons in the village/locality clearly stating my objectives. I also invited questions from the community and answered to every question to their satisfaction. Normally I ended the first session by asking them "are they happy with my responses and do they have any question? Afterwards, I told them I will have debriefing when I complete my fieldwork in their community". Indeed during my fieldwork, I made it a point to debrief the community prior to my departure from the field on the findings and get it validated by the people of the community. I found that in some cases it worked well but in most cases I found it difficult to bring the people together for another session. What is important on my part is that I have tried to remain transparent and accountable to the people though not fully successful in this endeavour.

**Understanding Development through Anthropological Lens:
What have I learnt from Anthropology⁸¹?**

In the following section I will discuss my position on two important but very influential fields within anthropology. These are development and medical anthropology. Having background in economics, I will draw upon from my experience in teaching and research in development issues and also having an identity of "economic anthropologist" who is familiar with economic concepts⁸².

Development is widely understood from the context of evolution or progression of society from the context of economics. Hence we see that there is different field in economics which is known as "development economics". The growth of "development economics" is basically rooted in the study of "developed" economics. The models and theories that were evolved and studied are centered on the history of the development of the "developed" societies and in developing these theories and models the economists of developed countries considered their history but denied the history of the societies where these models and theories are applied. On the contrary, anthropology as a field of study has evolved centering the study of so called "primitive" and "preindustrial" societies by the social scientists of the developed West. As I stated earlier that anthropology has a colonial legacy and theories and ethnographies written on the basis of study of these of societies have "ethnocentric" connotation wherein the scheme of societal development of non-Western societies were always leveled as moving from savagery to barbarism reaching the highest rung of the ladder described as "civilization"⁸³. Early writings of anthropologists are replete with examples of this kind of attitude towards a large part of humanity which are mostly under colonial administration⁸⁴.

Development economics is indeed the bearer of the same kind of tradition like the anthropology which is now being challenged not only by anthropologists but also by economists. One of the

most popular and widely cited models in development economics is Rostow's (1960) stages of economic growth which was viewed as "Non-Communist Manifesto" stated that "development was to take place in a capitalist context, rather than a communist one"⁸⁵. The process of development is defined "in relation to modernity, and to a move from agricultural societies with traditional cultural practices, to a rational, industrial and service focused economy"⁸⁶. He suggested five stages model of development starting from what Rostow (1960) called "traditional society" at the lowest rung and ultimately passing through other stages and ultimately achieving the development which he called "age of high mass consumption" at the top rung of the ladder. One important connotation of this highly influential model is that development is being dubbed as "modernity" which is to be "achieved through following Western models of "success"⁸⁷. This kind of generalization and universalisation of model whether by anthropologists or economists is highly problematic.

So, one can see that development as a discourse of socio-economic advancement has been conceptualized and understood as a part Western Eurocentric thinking. In the past, generally the objectives of development and strategies to attain these objectives have been prescribed and designed by forces that have little understanding of the socio-cultural and political process of the "underdeveloped" world. The following two quotes succinctly present the philosophical inadequacy of mainstream development thinking.

Frank (1966) opined that "we cannot hope to formulate adequate development theory and policy for the majority of world's population who suffer from underdevelopment without first learning how their past and social history gives rise to their present underdevelopment"⁸⁸. Griffin (1979) on the other hand argued for historical understanding of the process of underdevelopment. Griffin (1979) describes, "The automatic functioning of the international economy, which Europe dominated, first created underdevelopment and then hindered

efforts to escape from it. In summary, underdevelopment is a product of historical process".⁸⁹ He further pointed out that, "underdevelopment is not original or traditional, and that neither the past nor the present of the underdeveloped countries resembles in any important respect the past of the now developed countries. The now developed countries were never *underdeveloped* though they may have been *undeveloped*⁹⁰". (emphasise mine)

I argue that development ideas that have been evolved over the past several decades are rooted in certain assumptions that denied the history and culture of the so-called underdeveloped countries. A consideration of the past history and culture would have been useful in evolving a more effective concept of development for these countries.

Development is not regarded as economic, social, cultural and human relation rather as a technological relation of capital and output. The growths of GNP, per-capita income, industrialization, urbanisation etc. are used as some universal material indicators of development. Major human indicators are either ignored or given less emphasis⁹¹.

I would further state that the anthropologists have brought a new dimension and a critical perspective in the study of development by questioning the mainstream development thinking⁹². The crux of the anthropologists approach is that they are trained and motivated to be cultural relativists who consider each culture portraying unique situation and there cannot be any 'universal culture' while the mainstream development proponents consider development as universal phenomenon which incorporates universal principal of progress which I have already mentioned. There is, therefore, a clear 'ethnocentric connotation' within the concept of development and is questioned by anthropologists providing an alternative analysis of development. Over the years I have learnt that the most important contribution of anthropology of development is its ability to *deconstruct the assumptions and power relations of development* (emphasize mine) a

task which has been gathering momentum over the last decades or so⁹³. In this regard I would briefly elucidate the contribution of few anthropologists on development which will be pertinent and at the same time illuminating.

The anthropologists like Escobar (1995), Ferguson (1994), Gardner and Lewis (1996) and Grillo and Stirrat (1997) to name few questioned some of the basic assumptions of the Western Development Discourse providing an alternative justification on the going development ideas and views⁹⁴. I would briefly draw upon from the works of Escobar and Ferguson to bring into focus the anthropological perspectives of development.

Escobar (1995) explains his position from post-structuralist and anthropological perspective stating that his approach is discursive, in the sense that it stems from the recognition of the importance of the dynamics of discourse and power to any study of culture. He further elaborates how the "Third World" has been produced by the discourses and practices of development since their inception in the early post World War II period. Escobar thinks that the study of development as discourse is akin to Said's study of discourses on the orient⁹⁵. On the other hand, Ferguson (1994) considers development as important concept like civilization in the 19th century but he sees development as what he calls "dominant problematic or interpretative grid through which the impoverished regions of the world is known to us" (xiii). He presented his study on the basis of a case study of one small African state Lesotho.

One can cite other examples of anthropologists working in the development but these two examples amply demonstrate that the anthropologists are not playing a passive role rather challenging and bringing new insight contributing in creating a critical mindset in the discussion of development. In one of my essays several years back, I have argued how anthropological approach can provide insight in understanding development in general and Bangladesh in particular⁹⁶.

When I look back and consider my work on development, I realize how anthropology has over the years created an insight and

realization that development success cannot be understood by material indicators rather it is important that one understands the context of development and assigns value to the people's need rather than grandioseing development through some models and theories. I argue that anthropologists are better equipped to understand the context compared to other social scientists. Penny (1972) an economist writes that,

from certain points of view, social anthropologists appear, from their training, to be well qualified to study the development process, they learn the language of the people they are studying, they stay long enough in the field to get to know at least some people well, and to see development in process, and they know that they must study a society in all its aspects⁹⁷.

Anthropology has developed the concept of culture to a point of great analytic utility and explanatory power which has been useful in explaining the behavior and various norms in particular societal context⁹⁸". In Western economic interpretation, many behavior and norms in a "traditional and undeveloped" society which might appear irrational, unrealistic, and illogical however, carry intricate cultural meaning. Anthropologists are better equipped to reveal those cultural meanings which may apparently look irrational⁹⁹. From detailed case studies, Dube (1977) argued that *secondary and tertiary ramifications of given innovations are of critical significance in determining their ultimate acceptability*. Therefore, from his Indian experience Dube (1977) revealed that

the planners and their staff members no longer approach an underdeveloped community with the naïve assumption that it will enthusiastically adopt superior tools and techniques; instead, considerable emphasis is now laid on adapting modern techniques to the *culture and values of the community* in which the programme has to operate¹⁰⁰ (emphasize mine).

Another recent development in the study of development is the growing emphasize by anthropologists that "local knowledge" or "indigenous knowledge system" which is looked upon as

culturally specific knowledge in the study of “undeveloped” societies¹⁰¹. The crux of anthropological contribution on indigenous knowledge is that many so called “undeveloped” societies possess wealth of knowledge which can be utilized quite effectively in the rural socioeconomic and agricultural development. The problem however, which is pointed out by Chambers (1985) is that centralized urban and professional power, knowledge and values have flowed out over and often failed to recognize the knowledge of rural people themselves. He further added that an exception has been social anthropologists who have been at pains to experience cultures other than their own from inside, and to learn and understand the values and knowledge of those cultures¹⁰².

I conclude this section by taking a position and suggesting that anthropology provides ideas and framework for alternative thinking of development by arguing that there is no universal approach to development and every case of development is unique. Anthropology has put forward the need for a cultural construction of development discourse.

I also want to mention that medical anthropology has not only enriched anthropology but also contributed towards better understanding of the problems related to health looking at this through anthropological lenses. According to Johnson and Sargent (1990)

Medical anthropology has progressed beyond its roots in early ethnographic studies of ritual and religion, the culture and personality school, in ethnology, the post World War II international movement, and physical anthropology to claim an identity as flourishing sub field within anthropology¹⁰³.

Over the last two decades there has been an expression of research interest in the field of medical issues. Courses related to medical anthropology and anthropology of health has been incorporated in the anthropology and public health curriculum in Bangladesh and also in North America and Europe. Johnson and Sargent (1990) states that

Over the past ten years there has been a proliferation of research interests such that the field now encompasses a range of concerns, from a historically predominant cross-cultural study of local health beliefs and practices to the cultural construction of biomedicine¹⁰⁴

Apart from these two major changes there are other changes in the focus and subject matter of anthropology. I have noticed that anthropologists are increasingly getting involved as researchers and practitioners in diverse areas such as, AIDS, alcoholism, drug abuse, homosexuality, prostitutes, sexuality, nutrition, agriculture, environment, urbanization, urban poverty, migration, religious fundamentalism, body, education, housing and homelessness and tourism and its effect. It is obvious that there has been an increasing proliferation of areas and sub fields of anthropology. The question remains: what is its long run implications of this ever expanding change in the subject matter and focus of anthropology. Is anthropology is going to be study of everything?

Moore (1999) thinks that *the boundaries between sub-fields and topics are never fixed and are a matter of contestation within the discipline, where proponents constantly announce the arrival of a new sub-field of 'anthropology of'*¹⁰⁵. I have raised this issue in Alam (2005). I have argued that in spite of the expansion of disciplinary focus of anthropology and the prospect of what Moore calls "fragmentation¹⁰⁶", I have suggested that anthropology has been managing and will continue to manage and unite these diverse topics by taking its goal to a unified understanding of the human condition¹⁰⁷ which is also recognized as "holistic approach" to understand humankind¹⁰⁸.

Is Anthropological Research Method Unique?

My answer to the above question is that since the formation of anthropology as discipline it has introduced a repertoire of research techniques which generated in-depth information and enriched social science research by exposing truth and analysis

behind figures. It has indeed added a new dimension in the social science research methods. Having said this I would add that I do not like anthropology to be identified only with qualitative methodology and data collection techniques. The dichotomy between the qualitative and the quantitative techniques and the attitude that, excepting the anthropologists, all other social scientists pursue quantitative approaches are not based on current reality and practice. It is true that in the early years of anthropology, anthropologists conducted their research in small communities using certain research tools. Some of these include participant observation, key informant interviewing, collection of life histories, and case studies. Some researchers term anthropological research as "intensive" or "in-depth" research and consider "participant observation" as a core tool and "trade mark" of anthropological research¹⁰⁹.

In contemporary anthropology existing research tools have been expanded to include quantitative research techniques such as, structured interviews and surveys. The current trend is to *combine qualitative and quantitative methods*, which are expected to complement one another. Therefore, we see that anthropologists not only describe and analyze information collected through long-term observation but they also quantify that information. Currently, anthropologists use different statistical research tools in their research. The combining and synthesizing of quantitative and qualitative data in applied anthropological research has become a common practice in contemporary anthropological research¹¹⁰.

Although fieldwork still constitute the hallmark of anthropology that distinguishes anthropology from other discipline, but the days of long-term fieldwork is gone. Now the trend is "short term", "limited", "restricted" term fieldwork and discern as much information as possible within a limited time. Long term fieldworks involving several months and sometime years have been gradually shrinking and the current trend is to collect in-depth and reliable information without spending too much time. The long term fieldwork is necessary mostly in

academic dissertation research but for policy oriented qualitative research the tendency is to collect information within short time by applying different applied anthropological/social science research methods.

Another issue that continues to crop up in my thinking how fieldwork which is "hallmark" of anthropology will turn up in the globalised world and how the anthropologists are going to adopt and respond to the changes brought about by globalization. My thinking is that globalization has brought changes not only in human relations but also brought changes that affecting the human life, society, culture and issues that anthropologists have been focusing till recently. All these have brought changes not only in the subject-matter but also in the methodology and approach in the study various issues. Anthropologists cannot be oblivious of these and other concomitant changes that are affecting the practice of anthropology. Anthropology has gone local to global and we need to think considering the reality with a pragmatic outlook.

The recent changes in the methodologies of applied social sciences including anthropology are significant. The Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP), Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Focused Ethnographic Study (RES) are new techniques that are frequently used in applied anthropological research. All these techniques emphasize on getting qualitative data in relatively short time frames compared with other older ideas of lengthy ethnographic field research. I am quite aware of the limitations and the overuse and misuse of these rapid techniques by applied social scientists. However, from my own experience, I have found that it is possible to generate rich information by anthropologists through careful application of these new tools. The point that I want to make here that I am not against long term research but considering the demand and need of the time we need to redefine our research strategy without compromising the quality of research.

Although computer use in anthropology is not routinised in anthropology, however, computer use has increased to a

tremendous magnitude in the last two decades. Computers are not yet regarded as “indispensable adjuncts” but it is best described as “useful adjuncts”¹¹¹. After the marketing of the personal computer since 1982 and with greater emphasize on quantification in anthropology, the necessity of the use of computer has been strongly felt and gradually computer is emerging as indispensable tools in anthropology. The development of computer software in anthropological data analysis is another development in anthropological research.¹¹²

How I See Jahangirnagar Now?

Since establishment of the department in 1986, it has flourished considerably and it has crossed different steps as well as hurdles towards maturity in terms of curriculum, number and quality of faculty, research, national and international contacts and exposure. We waited more than 10 years to introduce Mphil and PhD programmes. These higher study programmes were introduced only when we realized that the department is ready and equipped to introduce the programme. It is pertinent to mention here that the first PhD degree in anthropology was awarded in the year 2010. I am very happy to able to guide the first PhD student of the anthropology department of Jahangirnagar University. This is another important achievement which again shows the collective effort of the faculty to enrich the academic programme of the department. Over the years, Jahangirnagar anthropology has never stopped changing and there is I believe a conscious and concerted effort by the faculty to revise and revisit the curriculum so that it never falls behind of what is going on in the field of anthropology both in and outside Bangladesh.

The variety of research interest, participation in national and international research projects, and presentation of papers on overarching issues by faculty in different forums is a glaring example of painstaking endeavor by faculty to make it the best department in the country and in South Asia. This also reveals that

Jahangirnagar has been always looking for relevance in its academic endeavour and to live up to the age. It is gratifying that the faculty of the department has a great deal of consensus on the curriculum they teach. In this process the department encourages debate, discuss and agree to reach consensus.

Having said this on reflection, I will point out that there is need for more academic interaction between colleagues not only to learn but to update debate and refresh one's knowledge. I think in this pursuit it does not matter who is what (i.e. senior or junior) rather the purpose will be to engage in debate and discussion with all. I would say that this kind of engagement is awfully lacking. This should be developed from within the faculty and individual desire to get engage in this pursuit.

Students are the integral part of teaching in the university. Over the years the number of students taking admission in the department has increased considerably. Does it demonstrate that anthropology has become popular? What is the quality of students who are getting admitted in anthropology? My answer to the first question is negative and most students are studying anthropology not as their first choice. Many of these students are coming to study anthropology because they do not have any choice and want a university degree¹¹³. This is a general scenario in all the universities of the country. This was not the trend in the initial years when anthropology has been introduced in the late 1990s. Another issue is the quality of students which has deteriorated in recent years. These students do not want to study and I found it difficult to make the students read. This is a growing trend among the students not only at Jahangirnagar but also in other universities.

The quality of students also affect the quality of teaching because if students are dormant, non interactive and does not go through the required reading regularly faculty might lose interest and which may affect the quality of teaching. Quality of teaching is

another overarching issue that is being discussed all across the country. It is important that faculty take teaching seriously, update and get engaged with the colleagues and the students in academic pursuit. Teachers should fulfill their primary responsibility towards their parent institution and then get involved in other activities.

How do I want to see Anthropology in future?

In the last several pages of this paper, I have expressed my views on certain overarching issues that confront the contemporary anthropology and also stated my position in this regard. The starting point of my life trajectory with anthropology was 1988 article where I clearly stated my views and position regarding how I see anthropology and also the way anthropology should be pursued and practiced in Bangladesh¹¹⁴. After 25 years I am very pleased to find out that anthropology at Jahangirnagar has been growing in the way I visualized and progressing in the right direction. Are the issues that I raised and my expectation 25 years back is just a coincidence or the normal process of the development of anthropology at Jahangirnagar? I leave it to the readers to think and decide. What is important to me that I am glad to be able a part of the process with other faculties of the department and want to see its continuous success in future.

Let me reiterate what I have proposed regarding how social science vis a vis anthropology should be pursued in Bangladesh. I proposed that "every social science should be pursued with two principal objectives; a) an academic objective whose main function is to impart education, train people and also to develop new concepts and theories and, b) applied and practical objectives to serve the society through the identification of socio-economic problems and be a part in this process. These two objectives are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. A theory or concept should not be adopted or applied without understanding its inherent meaning and context of development".¹¹⁵ I have suggested that

"our emphasis should be on the contextualization and operationalisation of the various concepts and theories, considering the insider's viewpoint and the reality of Bangladesh society".¹¹⁶

I think that currently there is greater realization and understanding regarding the boundary of academic anthropology and also how this should be pursued. The recent curriculum of Jahangirnagar is adequate enough to dispel any misunderstanding regarding how anthropology should be pursued in Bangladesh. This is an excellent blending of what is expected from a mature and world class department.

I think we should not allow us to get influenced by what is once highlighted by some as "donor-driven anthropology", "anthropology of NGOs" or "market-oriented anthropology". At one stage, I was accused for promoting "donor-driven or market-oriented" anthropology. My position was clear and I persuasively argued that anthropology should not be viewed from the perspectives of few who think that those who study anthropology should be skilled in theory, philosophy, history, construction and deconstruction. Alongside there is other side of the coin where the need is to train the students on the application of anthropology and helping them to acquire the skill to compete with the graduates of other social sciences in the job market of the free market economy.

I always believed and practiced throughout my teaching life that the universities are the best place for free thinking and practice of knowledge according to one's choice and interest. There should not be any imposition of any kind of thinking or ideology which someone believes and therefore other should follow it too. I propose that Jahangirnagar should bring all types of thoughts, theories and ideologies to the attention of the students and it is the students who will decide what to take and forsake. There should not be any compulsion on this free choice of students.

Conclusion

The task of writing the conclusion of my life trajectory in anthropology which runs over thirty-five years is a horrendous task. At the outset of this paper, I asked to myself where to start and now I ask where to end. I have completed tenure at Jahangirnagar on July 2014 which I have called "exit". But life goes on and one cannot rewind this and start anew. However, I must say that over the years through the pursuit of anthropology, I have learnt that every human being has dignity, their identity, the right to live and deserve respect and recognition. Anthropologists have the responsibility not only to practice these enduring values of anthropology but also endeavour to inoculate these values to all (i.e., students, other social scientists, politicians and civil society). We should not forget that we constitute a privileged cohort of professionals compared to millions of others around us who are deprived, abused, remain hungry and fight for survival. I trust that anthropology in Bangladesh will progress and continue to play its role to build a society based on human dignity, equality, and the right to live irrespective of the background and identity of the people.

Notes

- ¹ The idea for this paper came from my colleague Mahmudul Sumon who was student of mine in the department. While the department has been arranging a seminar in celebration of 25 years of its existence, Mahmudul suggested that being the senior most professor of the department who is associated with the department since its inception a paper of a "memoir type" with reflection would be interesting as well as illuminating. He also suggested that in the paper, I should also discuss and describe how I situate myself on certain overarching issues of contemporary anthropology. I also owe a great deal of debt to my colleagues in the department of anthropology at JU and also at Chittagong University with whom I interacted over the last four

decades. Of course it is also important to say that students of my class at different universities were also important in shaping my ideas and views and opened my mind to the value and need of practical implication of education. The usual disclaimer applies, however.

² I got this impression after I got the Agricultural Development Council (A/D/C) fellowship to study anthropology and also when I came back after completing my Ph.D in anthropology. This is because it was always the case that economics is the most sought after discipline (even today) and pursuing a career in economics is thought to be prestigious by all across the society. One of my friends even said that “you do not belong to anywhere now”. Though it was a crude remark but I never regretted for this switch and I enjoyed and adored my teaching and research in the last three decades in anthropology. I will elaborate this “identity issue” later in the paper.

³ Nurul Amin, communication, duecon1970@googlegroups.com February 4 2011

⁴ Currently it is known as Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB). It is under the Ministry of Local Government Rural Development and Cooperatives of the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

⁵ I got the offer through a competitive process of selection. It is important to mention here that when I got the appointment as Lecturer in economics at Chittagong University, Professor Muhammad Yunus was the Chairperson of economics department and renowned Litterateur late Professor Abul Fazal was the Vice Chancellor. Professor Yunus later got Noble Prize in 2006.

⁶ Later PIDE was renamed as Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

⁷ Zaid Bakth, communication, duecon1970@googlegroups.com , February 4 2011

- ⁸ I prepared two reports prepared independently by me. The first report was titled "A Report on Swanirvar Programme in Brommottar, Rangunia, Chittagong. August 1976. The second one was "A Report on Kaiyara-Ballovpur-Shariya Swanirvar Programmes, Feni, Noakhali, July 1976. The third report was prepared jointly with Md Sharif titled "A Report on Sonali Shaw, Chittagong (1974-76), March 1977
- ⁹ Later on I presented the findings at the 14th Conference on Bengal held on June 20-22, 1980 at Oakland University, Michigan, USA. In the Bengal conference in 1980, I for the first time met Professor Peter J Bertocci who was one of the first few anthropologists worked in Bangladesh. The conference brought together the North American based Community of Bengal Scholars. Later on the paper was published. See S. M. Nurul Alam, Recent Patterns of Rural Leadership in Bangladesh: Observations on the Union Parishad Leaders in a *Thana* of Chittangong District. In Peter J. Bertocci (ed). *The Study of Bengal: New Contributions to the Humanities and Social Sciences*. South Asia Series. Occasional Paper no. 21. Asian Studies Center. Michigan State University. Spring 1982. pp.81-90
- ¹⁰ Two universities worth mentioning in this regard were: Waterloo University and Carleton University of Canada.
- ¹¹ A/D/C was one of the best known organizations in the 1970s and 80s which provided numerous Masters and Ph.D fellowship to the academics and professionals in various social and agricultural sciences in the Asian region. A/D/C was later merged with Winrock International and no longer exists.
- ¹² The final selection was made at the A/D/C office at the Rockefeller Centre in New York. Prior to getting the official information, I got the news of the award of A/D/C fellowship from Professor Muhammad Yunus through a personal letter (letter dated 23 November 23, 1977) who was in New York at that time and was visiting the A/D/C office at the invitation of Professor Walter Coward of Cornell University.

Renowned economist Professor Vernon W. Ruttan was the President of A/D/C. My formal award letter from A/D/C's New York Office was issued on May 26, 1978.

- ¹³ Purdue University is located in the West Lafayette; Indiana is one of the top universities in the USA. It was more known for its engineering schools and it falls in the middle category in social science. Purdue's Agricultural Economics Department was also best known schools in the USA. A number of A/D/C fellows from many other countries completed their Ph.D in Agricultural Economics from Purdue. Choice of Purdue University was not a conscious one. Indeed I was admitted in the MS programme in anthropology prior to getting the A/D/C fellowship. My final offer letter was issued by A/D/C fellowship officer Ms. Grace Tongue on May 26 1978. So when I got the confirmation of fellowship, the fellowship officer directly send my award letter to Purdue with the advice that A/D/C will support my study at Purdue.
- ¹⁴ While going through this phase, I requested Dr. Edward Clay who was leading the country office of A/D/C to procure some basic books so that I can have some idea prior to the beginning of the semester in the USA. Dr. Clay quickly arranged four books. These were: Lucy Mair, An Introduction to Social Anthropology, Robin Fox, Kinship and Marriage, Marshall Shalins Stone Age Economics and E.E. Evans Pritchard , The Nuer. These books were unfamiliar to me but later in course of my study at Purdue I realized how important these books were in the study of anthropology.
- ¹⁵ Each course at Purdue is equivalent of 3 credits. Thirty-six hours mean 12 courses out of which 15 credit hours must be in core courses. But to complete the Ph.D coursework, one requires to completing 48 credit hours inclusive of previous 36 credit hours. In this process one can opt for Master of Science after successfully completing 36 credit hours and passing the diagnostic examination. This is a standard practice of

anthropology programme in North American University as I understood later.

¹⁶ Indeed Anth 535 which is titled "Foundations of Physical Anthropology" course was offered by a professor who was basically biologist vis a vis biological anthropologist. It was indeed difficult to satisfy her in exam and class discussion because I was not very technical in the discussion because of my background. But I must say that Professor was very much aware of my limitations and helpful. This was true for other core courses which I took during my course work. Interestingly I ended up with A in this course.

¹⁷ Cultural anthropology basically focuses on the issues related to culture and society. In the UK and Europe it is known as social anthropology.

¹⁸ In the research methodology course the books which are used as text were: Anthropological Research: The Structure of Enquiry by P.J Pelto and G.H. Pelto, Participants Observation by James Spradley, Marginal Natives at Work-Anthropologists in the field edited by Morris Freilich. These are classic in anthropological research which we use even today.

¹⁹ I was very pleased to complete my coursework with Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 5.93 on a scale of 6. This raised my confidence and generated interest in anthropology. I knew having background in economics, I would be able to better synthesis of what I have learned in economics with my new vision created by coursework in anthropology. During this time I read a lot of books and articles written by anthropologists on economics of pre-industrial society, village studies and also peasant society of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Some of my favourite writers were Oscar Lewis, Robert Redfield, Eric Wolf, Marshal Shalins, Ralph Beals, Karl Polanyi and George Dalton to name few. Stephen Gudeman's book on Economics as Culture-Models and Metaphors of Livelihood. Routledge (1986) was quite illuminating. Among the theoreticians, I also read with interest the books by Marvin Harris and Leslie White. Later on in the economic anthropology course,

I was introduced to Andre Gunder Franke and Emmanuel Wallenstein's works. During this time one thing I learnt that there is no short cut to extensive reading.

- ²⁰ I could not waste any time after defending the proposal because it was almost binding for me to complete my degree within five years including fieldwork after which my fellowship will be terminated.
- ²¹ The final title of my proposal was "Marginalization, Pauperization and Agrarian Change in the two Villages of Bangladesh".
- ²² The name of my Major Professor was Jack O. Wadell. He worked among the American Indians for a long time and written extensively. He gave time and advice without any hesitation and encouraged me when I felt depressed during my coursework. Even when I was in the field, I kept constant touch with him and he responded to all my queries. It is just for record here that there was no scope for electronic communication which is normal now. My communication with my professor took time. I sometime sent my field notes by express air mail and while in emergency through fax which was expensive. During the writing stage Professor Wadell spent hours and hours reading and editing the chapters without being tired and showing any dissatisfaction. I could not have finished my dissertation without the support of Professor Wadell.
- ²³ I have written two papers on the issues of conducting fieldwork in one's own society. These are: Problems of Conducting Fieldwork in one's Own Society: A Personal Assessment. (Written in Bangla), *Nribighan Journal*. 1987, Vol.1, pp. 1-19. Also see Nativising Anthrpology: Trends in Anthropolgical Fieldwork. In S. M. Nurul Alam, Ainun Naher and Manosh Chowdhury (ed.). *Contemporary Anthropology*. Collection of Papers presented at the Seminar on Contemporary Anthropology. Published by Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka1999/.pp.69-87

- ²⁴ This is an expression used by some political activists to working for greater global justice, refer to Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean which is inhabited by majority of the world populations. The New Internationalist magazine which first uses the term stated that 79% of the world population in 2001 lives in the nation which is termed as "South". See Katie Willis (2009), *Theories and Practices of Development*. Routledge. p.17
- ²⁵ I will cite the example of Melanesia which is one of the most studied culture areas in the world. Some of the important research in anthropology has been conducted by pioneers in anthropology that include Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, Pitt Rivers, Seligmann, Haddon, Thurnwald, Bateson and many others. Indeed Keesing has rightly pointed out that for "three quarters of a century Malenasia has provided a unique laboratory for comparative study, a mosaic of variations in kinship and descent, in ritual and cosmology." See Roger M. Keesing (1973), *Anthropology in Melanesia-Retrospect and Prospect* in Huzier and Mannheim (eds.), *The Politics of Anthropology*, Mouton. PP. 276-80
- ²⁶ However, the use of the word "nativising" has raised some questions (or created confusion) among some of my students. They were wondering and asking me why I have used the word "native" which has been used by the Western anthropologists to indicate "primitive" and "pre-industrial people" of the non-Western World. There is a kind of ethnocentric leveling to this word. Some even have suggested that I could replace native by the word "localizing" or "indigenousing" anthropology. However, I argued that I am aware of the widespread use of the word native which led to the creation of the view what we call "otherness". I have consciously used the word to imply that native indicate that we are the people of the soil and it does not matter whether someone calls us non western, local or indigenous people.
- ²⁷ See S. M Nurul Alam,(2000), "Nativising Anthropology: Trends in Anthropological Fieldwork" in SM Nurul Alam, Ainoon Naher and

Manas Chowdhury (eds), *Contemporary Anthropology*-Collection of Papers presented at the Seminar on Contemporary Anthropology on July 3 and 4. Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka June 2000. PP. 69-86

²⁸ Peter Kloss, (1969). Role Conflicts in Social Fieldwork. *Current Anthropology*. Vol. 10, No.5, PP. 509-23

²⁹ Ibid. p.509

³⁰ This part of the discussion is based from one of earlier essays. See Alam (2000). Op. cit. pp.77-78

³¹ The two concepts "marginal man" and "marginal native" have been first used by Morris Freilich (1977) ed. See the book titled *Marginal Natives at Work- Anthropologists in the Field*. Schenkman Publishing Company, USA, p.2

³² The reaction in the parenthesis is my assessment after watching the respondents' interest, attitude and body language.

³³ The name of the village that I mentioned in this paper is pseudonymous names. This I did consciously to protect the identity of the villagers.

³⁴ Indeed I commuted in the two research villages for about nine months. One research assistant was permanently posted in each village. I rented a place for them to stay.

³⁵ My Major Professor was Jack O Waddell, and other members of the committee were Dr. Richard Blanton, Dr. Myrdene Anderson and Dr. Tenzin Takla.

³⁶ Since the first day of my study at Purdue, my wife Surayya was with me. Indeed I got married prior to my departure for USA. She was a great support and shared the pains and joys during my sojourn at Purdue.

- ³⁷ Please see Alam (1983), op.cit for capturing my arguments in the dissertation.
- ³⁸ See Clifford Geertz (1963). *Agricultural Involution: The process of Ecological Change in Indonesia*. University of California Press. Geertz's book is a classic study on agrarian ecology of Java Indonesia. Although his idea of involution has been criticized it however, it remained quite highly influential study for quite some time.
- ³⁹ Prior to shifting to current location at Mirpur Grameen Bank was temporarily located at a rented house at Shamoli.
- ⁴⁰ I have borrowed this expression from Epstein. See T. Scarlett Epstein. 1975. For an excellent discussion on the relationship of economics and anthropology and how it complements one another see her paper titled "The Ideal Marriage between the Economist's Macro approach and the Social Anthropologist's Micro approach to Development Studies". *Economic Development and Cultural Change*. Vol. 24, pp. 29-45.
- ⁴¹ Full time teachers were: Ms. Rahnuma Ahmed and Ms. Farzana Islam. Professor Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir of Dhaka University taught as Adjunct Professor for a long time. He was very supportive since the inception of the department and taught several courses that were necessary when the department was lacking faculty to teach course in a new discipline. I gratefully acknowledge his contribution at the inception stage of the department.
- ⁴² Perhaps it will not be inappropriate to mention here that I became the first Professor of Anthropology in an Anthropology Department of Bangladesh. There were persons with PhD in Anthropology at Chittagong, Dhaka and Rajshahi Universities but they were Professor/Associate Professor of Sociology department rather than in anthropology.
- ⁴³ Indeed I taught this course for quite a long time with a small break 1998 due to illness. This course was important because the beginners in anthropology held serious wrong notion about anthropology which portrays wrong impression about anthropologists and also the subject-

matter of anthropology. The task of teaching an introductory course in a new subject and in a department was illuminating and challenging because this cohort of students would present and represent anthropology outside the classroom which will be critical for anthropology in the years to come. Indeed I found that anthropology is a least understood discipline not only among the students, but also among the colleagues of other departments, university administrator and also the public at large.

⁴⁴ See S. M. Nurul Alam 1988. "Anthropology in Bangladesh: World Context, Main Issues, Concerns and Priorities." *Jahangirnagar Review, Part II, Social Science*, Vols. 11 & 12, pp. 93-110.

⁴⁵ Recently my colleague Mahmudul Hasan Sumon suggested that I should add another about anthropology. He has learnt from the students that anthropologists are looked upon as atheists and does not believe in God. This is indeed unbelievable that after more than quarter of century of practice of anthropology in Bangladesh people still hold this kind of views.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.100-101

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.103

⁴⁸ Readers are referred to contemporary views on culture and the debate centering culture in anthropology and culture studies. However, my focus in this paper is to discern its role in understanding development and other related issues.

⁴⁹ See Ibid. 101 for more discussion on this issue. It should be also mention here that what is mean by Social in Europe is cultural in North America. Indeed in North America Cultural Anthropology is considered as sub-field of four field approach. I will later discuss my position regarding the four field approach later in this paper.

⁵⁰ Over the years, I have used the expression "need-oriented relevant anthropology" in a number of my writings to emphasize

'appropriateness' and 'pertinence' of anthropology to the need and dominant concern of the society. This is indeed what I have called "searching for relevance" for anthropology. I consider this necessary for the future of anthropology but I was criticized by some of my colleagues who misunderstood my position and leveled this as my attempt to pursue "market anthropology" as opposed to what they view as "academic anthropology".

⁵¹ Del Hymes. (Ed.). 1974. *Reinventing Anthropology*. Vintage Books, New York; Diane Lewis. 1973. "Anthropology and Colonialism." *Current Anthropology*. Vol. 14, No.5, pp.581-602

⁵² Talal Asad. 1979. "Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter." In Geritt Huizer and Bruce Mannheim (Ed.), *The Politics of Anthropology: From Colonialism, Sexism Toward a View from the Below*. Mouton Publishers. Netherlands. pp. 85-96. Gough, Kathleen Gough, 1968a. Anthropology and Imperialism. *Monthly Review*. Vol. 19. No.2. pp.12-27. Kathleen Gough. 1968b. New Proposals for Anthropologists. *Current Anthropology*. Vol. 9, pp. 403-407

⁵³ J. Clifford, and G. Marcus (eds.). 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. University of California Press. J. Clifford. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture*. Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art. Harvard University Press

⁵⁴ Alam (1988). Op.cit., p.107

⁵⁵ The Department of Anthropology at Jahangirnagar is now recognized by University administrator, university faculty, development institutions, development practitioners, expatriate academicians as the best department in the country. Two Vice Chancellors of the Jahangirnagar University (i.e Professor Mustahidur Rahman and Professor Alauddin Ahmed) publicly announced that this department is the best in the country. Our syllabus is now used as a model syllabus for other universities of the country. This was made possible due to hard work,

commitment and sincerity of the faculty and the staff of the department.

⁵⁶ I consider this important that there is a cohort of sociologists who thought that anthropology can be pursued within sociology and there is no need for a separate department of anthropology. Due to this attitude and resistance several attempts to open an independent department of anthropology could not be materialized at Dhaka and other universities. It is important to understand the covert politics of social science centering faculty members deter early opening of anthropology in the universities. The university faculty and administrator at Jahangirnagar took the bold step in opening the first department of anthropology in the country in 1986. After Jahangirnagar, several more departments were opened at Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Jagannath University and Comilla University.

⁵⁷ This syllabus was prepared by Ms. Rahnuma Ahmed, Professor BK Jahangir with support from Sussex University. Dr. Hillary Standing of Sussex University was actively involved in providing input in the preparation of the syllabus.

⁵⁸ In the last three decades I was involved as external member of the curriculum committees in developing and updating the syllabus of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong and Jagannath universities. I also acted as the chairperson of the syllabus committee constituted to formulate the BSS (honours) and MSS syllabus of anthropology of National University. I was involved to prepare and work on the anthropology syllabus of the Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB) as external member. It may be mentioned here that IUB is the first Private University to take the led to introduce anthropology at a private university.

⁵⁹ Quoted from the syllabus for the academic sessions 2007-08 to 2010-11.

- ⁶⁰ This discussion is based on one of my earlier papers. See S.M. Nurul Alam (2005). Changing Focus of Anthropology: Where is the End?. *South Asian Anthropologist (India)*. Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 217-228
- ⁶¹ Indeed one separate department of archaeology has been opened at Jahangirnagar. Again like anthropology this is the first department of archaeology in the country. The establishment of a separate department of archaeology is a reflection that this subfield of anthropology should be pursued separately and not within anthropology.
- ⁶² Marvin Harris and Orna Johnson 2000. *Cultural Anthropology*. Fifth Edition. Allyn and Bacon. p.2; Raymond Scupin 1998. *Cultural Anthropology-A Global Perspective*. Third Edition. Prentice-Hall. USA. Gary Ferraro. 1995. *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*. West Publishing Company. New York. Also see Marietta Baba. 1994. "The Fifth Sub-discipline: Anthropological and the Future of Anthropology." *Human Organization*. Vol. 53, No.2, pp.174-188
- ⁶³ Peter J. Bertocci, Oakland University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Rochester, Michigan. Personal Communication with the author. November 2003
- ⁶⁴ Barbara Miller D, Penny Van Esterik and John Van Esterik. 2001. *Cultural Anthropology*. Pearsons Education. P.5
- ⁶⁵ Clifford Geertz. 1991 quoted in Miller, 2003. *ibid*. p.5
- ⁶⁶ Raymond Wiest, Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba, Canada. Personal Communication with the author. December 2003.
- ⁶⁷ Raymond Wiest, *Ibid*.
- ⁶⁸ I will refer the reader to my 1988 article again in this regard.
- ⁶⁹ Alam, 2003. *Op.cit*
- ⁷⁰ Kathleen Gough, 1968a. *Op.cit*, 13
- ⁷¹ Ralph Grillo, 1985. *Op.Cit*, p.5
- ⁷² T. Scarlett. Epstein,. 1987. "Commentary: Thoughts on the Future of British Social Anthropology." *Human Organisation*. Vol. 44, No.2, pp. 187-188

⁷³ Quoted in Katy Gardner and David Lewis, 1996. *Anthropology, Development and the Post Modernist Challenge*. Pluto Press. P.36

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Cris Shore and Susan Right (1996). *Commentaries-British Anthropology in Policy and Practice: A review of Current Work. Human Organization*. Vol. 55, No.4, pp. 475-480

⁷⁶ Cris Shore, and Susan Wright (1996). *Op.cit.*, p.476

⁷⁷ Marietta Baba. 1994. "The Fifth Sub-discipline: Anthropological and the Future of Anthropology." *Human Organization*. Vol. 53, No.2, p. 181

⁷⁸ Conrad Phillip Kottak, 1994. *Cultural Anthropology*. p. 341, McGraw-Hill, Inc.

⁷⁹ John W. Bennett. 1996. "Applied and Action Anthropology: Ideological and Conceptual Aspects." *Current Anthropology*. Vol. 36. P. s25

⁸⁰ Marietta Baba. (1994). *Op.Cit.*, p.179

⁸¹ I think this section is important. I thought this paper which focuses my position and views on anthropology will be an important window how a person trained in "mainstream economics" look at the concept of "development". In this regard anthropologists have not only contributed significantly but also enriched our understanding of development. My emphasise in the caption is "*what have I learnt from anthropology*"? Indeed in this section, I have described what I have learnt from anthropology, how this is different from my previous understanding of development issues and also how it influenced my thinking over the years. In this connection, I will refer to paper published long back in the *Journal Economic Development and Cultural Change* (Vol 36, no 3). The title of the paper was: "Cultural Endowments and Economic Development: What can we learn from anthropology"? written by Vernon W. Ruttan. So I thought this sub-section will be useful from my perspective as economic anthropologist and how I see development.

⁸² I draw upon from my experience of teaching Development Anthropology at Jahangirnagar University for many years and from my interaction with the students at JU and also at the North South University and Independent University of Bangladesh where I teach at the development studies programme as adjunct professor.

⁸³ This is considered as the early anthropologists model of evolution. See LL Langness (1987). *The Study of Culture*. Chandler & Sharp Publishers, Inc, California. p.14

⁸⁴ One of the classic sociological writings in this regard Lewis H. Morgan (1877). *Ancient Society*. World Publishing, New York

⁸⁵ See for detail discussion W.W.Rostow (1960). *The Stages of economic growth: A non-communist Manifesto*. Cambridge University Press.

⁸⁶ See for a very concise discussion Katie Willis (2005). *Op.cit.*, pp.39-42

⁸⁸ Frank, Andre Gunder Frank. (1966). *The Development of Underdevelopment*. *Monthly Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4. p. 17

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ A section of the discussion in this paragraph has been rewritten and derived from S. M. Nurul Alam and Rasheda Akhtar. 1998. "Experience of Development in Bangladesh: Anthropological Perspective." In Abdul Bayes and Anu Muhammad (Ed.), *Bangladesh at 25: An Analytical Discourse on Development*. University Press Ltd., pp.173-196

⁹² The following discussion is based on one of my earlier publications. Please see Alam (2005). *Op.cit.*, pp.221-223

⁹³ Katy Gardner and David Lewis (1996). *Op.cit.*, p.7

⁹⁴ There are many other books and contribution but I consider these four books as somewhat representative and will provide the reader food for thought in reconceptualising development keeping humankind as the beneficiaries of development. See Arturo Escobar (1995). *Encountering Development-The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press; James Ferguson (1994). *The Anti-politics Machine-*

Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho, The University of Minnesota Press; Katy Gardner, and David Lewis. Op. cit.; R.D. Grillo and R.L. Stirrat (ed.). (1997). *Discourses of Development- Anthropological Perspectives*. Berg. Oxford

- ⁹⁵ Arturo Escobar(1995). See page 3-20 including the preface of the book.
- ⁹⁶ S. M. Nurul Alam and Rasheda Akhtar. (1998). Op.cit., pp.173-196
- ⁹⁷ David H. Penny (1972). *Development Studies: Some Reflections*. In T. Scarlett Epstein and David H.Penny (eds.) *Opportunity and Response : Case Studies in Economic Development* C. Harst & Co.,p.5
- ⁹⁸ See Ralph W. Nicholas. (1973) , *Some Uses for Anthropology in Bangladesh*. The Ford Foundation, Dhaka, July 1973
- ⁹⁹ In Alam (1988), Op.Cit., I have provided few examples how the concept of culture can be used to explain different kinds of behavior. Also see Alam and Akhter (1998). Op.Cit
- ¹⁰⁰ S.C. Dube (1977). *Cultural Factors in Rural Community Development in Hari Mohan Mathur(ed.). Anthropology in the development Process*. Vikas Publishing House. pp. 139-155. Although written in 1977, some of the examples that he provided to strengthen his argument how the views, attitudes and preexisting belief affect the acceptance new technology and programmes are still valid. It proves the importance and value of culture in development.
- ¹⁰¹ See Zahiruddin Ahmed (1999). *Knowledge, Risk and Power: Agriculture and Development Discourse in a Coastal Village in Bangladesh*. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation. University of Sussex. Ahmad's is a seminal works in this regard. There is scope for more work in this field. Also see Paul Sillitoe (ed.). (2000). *Indigenous knowledge and Development in Bangladesh- Present and Future*. The University Press Ltd. Dhaka. The book by Sillitoe contains some excellent papers which provide state of art knowledge and contribution on indigenous knowledge.

- ¹⁰²Robert Chambers (1985). *Rural Development- Putting the Last First*. Logman, New York. p. 81
- ¹⁰³ Thomas Johnson and Carolyn F. Sargent (ed.) (1990). *Medical Anthropology-Handbook of Theory and Method*. Greenwood Press. New York. p.1
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.9
- ¹⁰⁵ Henrietta L Moore. (ed.). (1999). *Anthropology Today*. Polity Press. P. 4
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p.4
- ¹⁰⁷Richley H. Crapo (1990). *Cultural Anthropology-Understanding Ourselves and Others*. Dushkin Publishing Group Inc. Connecticut. P.4
- ¹⁰⁸ Alam (1988). Op cit., pp. 93-110
- ¹⁰⁹ There is element of truth in this kind of thinking however, I will oppose if anybody says that participant observation is the core technique and trademark of anthropological research.
- ¹¹⁰ For example, Chowdhury (1987) and Alam (1984) in their research used both qualitative and quantitative data in their analysis. They used regression, ANOVA, multivariate regression in their analysis. See S. M. Nurul Alam, 1984. Op.Cit (Ph.D dissertation). Also see Ahmed Fazle Hasan Chowdhury, 1987. Culture Change, Stress and Epidemiological Transition in Bangladesh: An Anthropological Study of Chronic Degenerative Disorders (Diabetes and Hypertension) among Rural and Urban Populations. A dissertation submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of Ph. D, Department of Anthropology, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.
- ¹¹¹ For an excellent discussion on the use of computer see Margaret J Boone, James Dow and John J. Wood, Use and Study of Computer Systems in the Development of Anthropological Methodologies. In Margaret J Boone, James Dow and John J. Wood, Computer Application for anthropologists. Wardsworth Publishing Co. pp.1-21
- ¹¹² Some popular software in this regard are Atlasti, SYSTAT, ANTHROPAC, GOEFR, ETHNOGRAPH

¹¹³ This is indeed what I found in the last several years. While teaching Anth 101 for the beginners in anthropology, I always asked how many of them have chosen anthropology spontaneously as their first choice. I found that only five to six students decided to pursue anthropology because they heard from their peer groups or relatives that this is a good subject and they can get a good job in NGO or in development organizations if they study anthropology. Other students say that they do not know anything about the subject and also not sure about its future prospect.

¹¹⁴ See Alam (1988). Pp.93-110

¹¹⁵ Alam, (1988), Op.cit., 77

¹¹⁶ Even today after 35 years of writing the paper I still stick to my stated position and argue for the kind of anthropology that I envisioned almost three decades back.

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